PROMOTING ALTERNATIVE THINKING STRATEGIES (PATHS®)

A school-based social and character development programme promoting emotional and social competencies and reducing aggression and behaviour problems in young children.

1. INITIATING ORGANIZATION(S), PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

Developed by Mark Greenberg, Prevention Research Center, Pennsylvania State University, USA.

2. THEORETICAL APPROACH

Central is the social information processing (SIP) theory of aggression (Dodge et al. 2006; Huesmann 1988), which describes how cognitive and emotional processes lead to aggressive behaviour. As indicated in Crean & Johnson (2013), the following four assumptions guide the PATHS prevention strategy:

- Children’s ability to understand and discuss emotions is related to both communicative development and the ability to inhibit behavior and show self-control;
- Children’s ability to manage, understand, and discuss emotions operate under developmental constraints and is also affected by socialization practices;
- Children’s ability to understand their own and others’ emotions is a central component to effective social problem solving;
- The school environment is a fundamental ecology that can be a central focus of change.

3. PROGRAMME DURATION

Ideally, initiated at the start of schooling and through to sixth grade.

4. COMPONENTS AND PRACTICAL INFORMATION

36 to 52 lessons, depending on grade, implemented primarily in school and classroom settings, but there is also information and activities for use with parents. Lessons are scripted, beginning with an introduction that states background and goals, implementation guidelines, suggestions for engaging parents, a list of common questions and answers, supplementary activities (some of which connect to academics), and/or family handouts. Each lesson ends with reminders and suggestions for generalising learned skills beyond the lesson to the classroom.

5. PROGRAMME PARTICIPANTS

PATHS® is designed for use in prekindergarten to sixth grade.

6. ASSESSMENT

Crean & Johnson (2013) tracked the development of two 3rd grade cohorts over three years in 14 schools. Schools were randomly assigned to intervention or control condition and third
grade students were followed through the fifth grade. Teacher and self-reports of student aggression, conduct problems, delinquency, acting out problems, and social information processing (SIP) variables were collected. Control students demonstrated increased normative beliefs about aggression, increased aggressive social problem solving, increased hostile attribution bias, and increased aggressive interpersonal negotiation strategies over time while PATHS students remained relatively stable. Teachers reported change in student aggression, conduct problems, and acting out behaviour problems – all favouring PATHS students.

Domitrovich, Cortes, and Greenberg (2007) found that the intervention group scored significantly better in emotional knowledge than the comparison group on the Assessment of Children’s Emotions Scale—Accuracy. Children exposed to PATHS® had a larger receptive emotion vocabulary and were more accurate in identifying feelings. Intervention children also had significantly lower anger attribution bias scores. There were no significant group differences on measures of inhibitory control, attention, or problem solving. In the same study, the intervention group scored significantly better than the comparison group on measures of social competence. Teachers in the intervention classrooms rated their students as significantly more cooperative, emotionally aware, and interpersonally skilled than teachers in the comparison classrooms did. However, follow-up analyses suggest that the intervention effect of PATHS® was present for children with higher mean levels of verbal ability, but children in the intervention group with lower verbal ability were no different from comparison group children. Finally, the study showed no significant differences on teachers’ ratings of externalizing behavior, but there were some significant effects observed on teachers’ ratings of internalizing behavior. Children exposed to PATHS® were significantly less likely to be described as withdrawn or lacking friends by their teachers at the end of the school year, compared with comparison children.

7. FURTHER READING AND CONTACT INFORMATION

